

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

Nevada

Diamond Mountain Area Fuels Treatments Help Reduce Wildland Fire Threat

The Bureau of Land Management's Battle Mountain Field Office is working with local ranchers on a series of hazardous fuels reduction projects in northern Nevada's Diamond Valley area. These projects are aimed at reducing the threat of aggressive wildland fires to the rangelands and improving range conditions.



Local community in a wildland-urban interface located adjacent to rangelands that were treated.

The latest phase of Diamond Mountain area fuels

treatments is one of several vegetation manipulation projects identified in the Diamond Mountain Environmental Assessment. These Diamond Mountain Grazing Complex projects are focused on five grazing units: Whistler, 6th Street, Black Point, Three Mile and Bailey.

The Whistler, 6th Street and Black Point grazing units are located adjacent to the community of Diamond Valley, so these fuels treatments will also help reduce the threat of wildfires in the wildland-urban interface.

Vegetation manipulation in the Diamond Mountain area includes the use of two different fuels treatments.

The first treatment involves brush beating with heavy equipment to remove the dense overstory of sagebrush, which should allow native species to be more competitive with invasive plants. The brush beating is done in multiple strips ranging from 40-50 feet wide, with each strip separated by 50-70 feet of vegetation that has not been manipulated. The brush was also manipulated for 50 feet on either side of roads within these grazing units.

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This illustrates how the rangelands look prior to treatment.

For the second treatment, the brush beaten strips are drill seeded with fire resistant seed mixes to establish perennial species. Since perennial species stay greener longer, they should provide valuable fuel breaks. These species also improve the health of the local ecosystem.

These two vegetation manipulation treatments were

used on approximately 50 percent of the Whistler, 6th Street and Black Point grazing units. The resulting fuel breaks will help protect adjacent private property, homes and other structures from wildfires that start on public lands, and will also help protect public lands from fires that begin on private property or on local roads.

The Whistler, 6th Street and Black Point treatments are creating fuel breaks to supplement the local roads, which can serve as firebreaks. Since the vegetation mixes on these fuel breaks create plants that are slower to ignite, any wildfires that come through the area can lose much of their aggressive power. This buys time for fire suppression resources to reach the scene and take action. The size of the units, along with the location and arrangement of the manipulated strips, contribute to an effective fire defense system for the community of Diamond Valley and the adjacent public lands. This fire defense system offers depth and continuity, and viability.

Brush beating and drill seeding are both positive steps toward creating areas of community defensible space. In addition, the danger of fire spreading from the wildlands onto private property can be reduced by planting certain shrubs, grasses and trees, using fire-resistant building materials, and clearing debris.

The Whistler, 6th Street and Black Point treatments were completed in November. Brush beating and drill seeding treatments were carried out on 2,200 of the 4,475 total acres in these grazing units. The mowing was done with government personnel and equipment, and a local contractor did the drill seeding.

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These units will be allowed to rest for two growing seasons, or until they meet the Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council's Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health. BLM monitoring and evaluation will determine the progress of vegetative treatment areas. Monitoring of this project will begin in 2003.

Project funding comes from both the Range Betterment Funds and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Fuels Reduction Funds. The range dollars designated for the vegetation manipulation projects are part of the grazing fees paid by ranchers for grazing public lands. The National Fire Plan funds WUI projects.

Local rancher participation was a great encouragement to Battle Mountain's Fuels Management Specialist Chad Lewis, who ran the project, and Fire Management Officer Dave Davis.

"The BLM has been involved in discussions with ranchers whose allotments are being affected by the fuels treatment," Davis said. "Their recommendations have impacted the decision-making process."

For example, area ranchers have suggested acreage that would benefit from vegetation manipulation while considering the health of other allotment sections. Rancher comments regarding recent activities have been positive.

One rancher felt he had nothing to lose by the vegetation manipulation. The affected area on his allotment was not productive for cattle grazing and was not in agricultural use. But he indicated that his grazing options might improve after the land was reseeded and allowed to rest for a time.

When another rancher found out that fuel reduction projects were being implemented on his allotment, he commented, "Good, I live out there."



A post-treatment view of the same area.

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Montana

Central Zone

The Armells Creek Watershed Environmental Assessment gave the Central Montana Fire Zone an opportunity to work with BLM's Lewistown Field Office resource specialists on a prescribed burn in the lower Armells Creek portion of the Missouri Breaks. An environmental assessment was completed which identified projects to meet resource and National Fire Plan objectives.



A draw near Armells Creek prior to fuels treatment.

The objectives of the prescribed fire projects were to:

- Reduce shrub/grassland encroachment by Ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and juniper;
- Improve livestock and wildlife distribution by stimulating forage and browse species;
- Reduce the available fuel load;
- Reintroduce fire into the landscape.

Conducting all burn activities in a safe and efficient manner is an overriding goal that is integrated into every project.

Zone personnel last spring burned 671 acres in the Armells Creek Watershed. The project targeted forested draws to reduce the threat of severe, large scale fire and to increase forage and browse by returning the area to an open conifer stand with grasses, forbs and shrubs in the understory. The main ignition method was aerial, using a plastic sphere dispenser in a helicopter.

The unit burned in a mosaic pattern ranging from canopy torching to light surface burning to unburned areas in the draw bottom. Seedling and sapling mortality ranged from 26%-100%. Ground cover burn severity ranged from moderate to high, and the duff layer burn

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severity ranged from low to moderate. Because the duff layer remained intact, most areas of the unit have considerable amounts of re-sprouting grasses, upland sedge, and deciduous shrubs.

With the success of this burn another project in a nearby draw is planned for implementation next spring. The second burn will have the same project objectives, and aerial ignition will be used again. The treatment area is 1,620 acres, and the forested draws will be targeted.

A long-term prescribed fire plan for the lower Armells Creek area is now being developed. This plan will follow the same objectives but will implement a series of burns over the course of many years. By alternating treated draws with untreated areas, wildlife cover will be maintained while wildlife forage and vegetation diversity will be enhanced.

Contact: Cindy Wilson (406) 538-1971



Near the same area after the treatment plan was implemented.

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Office of Fire and Aviation

National Awards Presented at BLM Fire Leadership Team Meeting

National awards for exceptional success were presented to BLM employees and offices during the BLM Fire Leadership Meeting in Billings, Montana on December 4. The awards were in two separate categories, with both an individual and group award in each.

The Excellence in Ecosystem Management in the group category was presented to the Rawlins, Wyoming Field Office and was accepted by Field Office Manager Kurt Kotter. The District was recognized for its exceptional work in leadership, management, planning and other aspects of carrying the objectives of the National Fire Plan forward.

The individual Excellence in Ecosystem Management award was presented to John Shive from the BLM Utah State Office for his leadership and support in implementing a broad range of programs supporting National Fire Plan goals.



(l to r) Tim Murphy, Deputy Director, Office of Fire and Aviation, Kurt Kotter, Rawlins, Wyoming Field Manager, Lynda Boody, Medford, Oregon Field Office, Jim Francis, California State Office, John Shive, Utah State Office.

The National Wildland Urban Interface group award was presented to the Medford, Oregon Field Office, and was accepted by Lynda Boody. The award recognized the broad and well-implemented program for wildland urban mitigation and prevention over the course of the year.

The individual National Wildland Urban Interface award went to Jim Francis of the California State Office for his tireless efforts in developing partnerships, leadership, and collaborative work leading to outstanding success during the year.

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In recognition of major efforts to ensure safety in every aspect of fire management, the Elko, Nevada Field Office was presented with the National Wildland Fire Safety Award. Field Office Manager Helen Hankins received the group award, and Elko Fire Management Officer Joe Freeland received the individual award.



Tim Murphy presents awards to Elko, Nevada Field Office Manager Helen Hankins and Fire Management Officer Joe Freeland.

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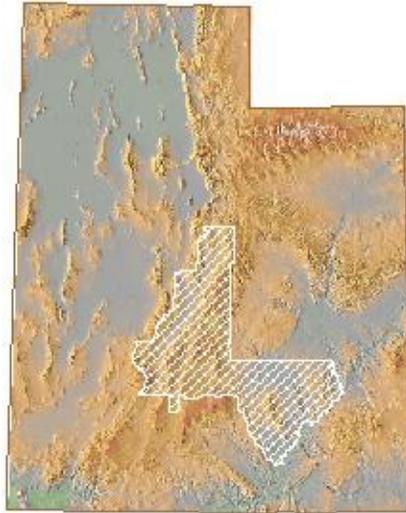
New Mexico Fire Management Officer Bob Lee makes a presentation to Pat Moore, Office of Fire & Aviation.

BLM's Fire Management Officers made a special presentation to Pat Moore of the Planning and Resources Group at the national office for her exceptional efforts to help field offices meet heavy workload demands during the year.

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Utah



Richfield Field Office

Praetor Slope Fuel Reduction Project

The project area lies within the Bureau of Land Management Richfield Field Office Fishlake Allotment. The treatment area is about three miles northeast of the community of Koosharem, Utah.

Wildland urban interface information collected by BLM, Forest Service, and Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands personnel revealed several small subdivisions downwind of the Praetor Slope area containing some full-time residents and numerous part-time seasonal residents.

These subdivisions lie in an area composed of continuous dense sagebrush cover and scattered young juniper trees. The dry subdivisions in this wildland setting raised some concern for wildfire risk with BLM's fire and fuels staff in Richfield, Utah. Staff members developed a plan to break up the continuity and reduce the total fuel load in this potentially hazardous setting.

The plan consisted of utilizing a large tractor to pull an extremely large and heavy harrow (Dixie Harrow) through the 3,000-acre area removing the sagebrush and young junipers. After the area was harrowed once, then a combination of broadcast seeding and



Community located in a classic wildland-urban interface setting.

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The Dixie Harrow being used to remove sagebrush and juniper.

harrowing was completed in the opposite direction of the first harrowing. The seed mix that was used contained browse, grass, and forb species. Forage kochia, a fire resistant species, was later broadcast to the site through a separate application. These steps resulted in an effective fuel break between the small subdivisions and the wildland fuels.

Slope fuel reduction project resource and ecosystem values were addressed along with fire mitigation. The entire area is intermediate/summer deer range and winter elk range. Numerous islands and travel corridors were left untreated for wildlife and Visual Resource Management (VRM) values. Feathering of the harrow boundaries maximized the edge effect. The islands and feathered edges gave the treatment a natural look and satisfied VRM concerns.

Within the Praetor

In the event of a wildfire, the discontinuous fuels in this area will lower fire intensity and alter fire behavior making initial attack more successful. This will assist fire suppression resources in meeting their objectives before the fire reaches the subdivisions.



Wide-angle picture of the wildlife habitat in the area.

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Reducing the fuels in the Praetor Slope area is just one-step in making the communities throughout the Central Utah Fire Management Area safe from wildfire. Other fuel reduction projects within nine focus areas have been identified and are waiting implementation. In cooperation with interagency partners, BLM will continue to present educational programs for a variety of audiences to make the public aware of, and mitigate the risks associated with wildfire.



Displays are used as a part education at community meetings.

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Local residents learn about equipment and procedures.

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Arizona

BLM Employee receives Award for Fire Leadership

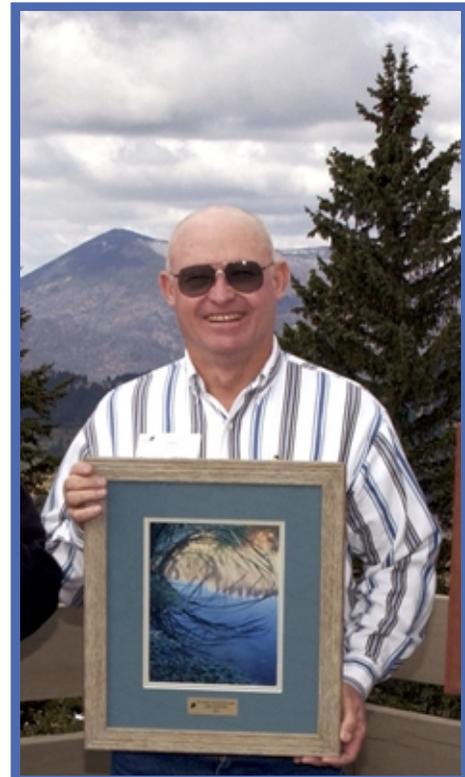
The Nature Conservancy of Arizona honored Larry Humphrey, who is a Safford Field Office fuels management specialist, on Oct. 18, 2002, for his career-long achievements in fire management. Humphrey is the Incident Commander in one of the two Southwest Area Type 1 National Incident Management Teams, and received Nature Conservancy's 2002 Joseph Wood Krutch Award, which recognizes the "demonstrated sincere and sustained commitment to conservation in Arizona." The award acknowledged Humphrey's efforts during the devastating 2002 wildfire season in Arizona, along with his continued advocacy for restoring the natural role of fire on public lands through prescribed burning. Humphrey has been instrumental in planning and conducting numerous prescribed fires in southeastern Arizona, including burns in cooperation with the Nature Conservancy at Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness, Muleshoe Ranch Cooperative Management Area, and Baker Canyon Wilderness Study Area. Pat Graham, who is the State Director for Nature Conservancy of Arizona, presented the award at the group's annual membership meeting, which was held at the Arizona Snowbowl in Flagstaff.

Contact: Dave Hall, (928) 348-4501

Fire Prevention "Success with a New Program"

In the year 2000, the National Fire Plan directed federal land management agencies to work with communities in helping to reduce the number of human caused wildfires, provide fire education to the public and reduce the threat to communities at risk from wildfires. The Kingman Field Office created a fire prevention position, and filled it in April 2001. Twenty-one months later, significant progress has been achieved.

Smokey Bear is now a regular visitor in Kingman. Local youth are in awe at his presence, and eager to help Smokey prevent unwanted fires. BLM prevention and fire



Larry Humphrey holds the Joseph Wood Krutch Award presented by the Nature Conservancy.

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Smokey at Kingman's annual Yada Yada Parade.

staff has provided handouts and learning opportunities to the public by attending local events, parades, homeowner meetings, fairs, and interviews with local TV stations. Fire prevention patrols are very successful in high-use areas. Public contacts are made with visitors to BLM lands. The local community has supported prescribed fire use in the mountains near Kingman due to public outreach efforts.

The Kingman fire staff has taken a proactive approach in dealing with communities at risk from wildfires. In the community of Pine Lake, four miles of fuel breaks have been constructed, hazard trees have been removed, education has been provided to homeowners, and fire preparedness plans were coordinated with local cooperators, agencies and residents. A brush disposal area was established to allow local residents to drop off hazardous vegetation that was removed from their property. The brush is then burned by the BLM and the Pine Lake Fire Department when the weather permits. A secondary escape route for Pine Lake was only passable by four-wheel drive vehicles. A joint funding effort between Mohave County and the BLM have made the necessary improvements possible. Vehicles are now able to use the secondary escape

route, which has helped put local residents minds at ease. Collaborative and cooperative efforts resulted in a well-planned wildfire contingency plan. In July 2002 the Wild Cow Fire posed an immediate threat to the Pine Lake community, and the contingency plan was implemented. The result was no damage to structures, and not a single injury. Without the advance planning and cooperative effort by BLM and the community, the outcome could have been much different.

The fire danger in the summer of 2002 observed by the Kingman Field Office was the worst on record. Drought has plagued the area for several years. Even with the extreme fire conditions, the number of human caused fires decreased. It is hard to measure fire prevention successes but the numbers speak for themselves. Without public outreach and



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support, the summer of 2002 could have been a lot different. The public was aware of the extreme fire danger through personal contacts, fire prevention messages on the radio and in the newspaper, and had seen fire prevention signs in the field. BLM prevention and fire staff was praised for the work being done to provide information to the community. Fire prevention is working and will continue to improve with increased public outreach.



Heavy equipment repairing Pine Lakes secondary escape route.

Contact: Michael Trent, (928) 962-4400

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Wild Cow Fire as seen from the community of Pine Lake.

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California

Community-Based Red Flag Program Flying High

Since 2001, National Fire Plan Wildland Urban Interface funding has allowed California BLM to support hundreds of community-generated, community-specific projects that reduce the risk of wildland fires in communities-at-risk. Among these innovative projects is the Greater Laguna Coast Fire Safe Council's Red Flag Program. This program is designed to provide a highly visible reminder to all citizens in the region to be extra careful and vigilant on the days when the Santa Ana winds blow - a condition that has fueled many devastating wildfires.



Local businesses do their part to increase awareness of severe fire conditions.

The Red Flag Program is managed and staffed by citizen volunteers. These community members follow pre-specified patrol routes along the wildland interface (the canyons and hillsides) to watch for fires and/or suspicious activity. Simultaneously, stores and businesses display fire safe council-

provided red flags along the highways and streets of the region to alert drivers and others to the hazardous conditions at hand.

Volunteers are alerted through a series of contacts that begin with the National Weather Service's alert of changing weather conditions that could bring high winds and low humidity over the region. When Red Flag Program coordinators are notified the program unfolds in the following stages:

Stage I. Fire Weather Watch. (Generally 48-72 hours in advance of weather event)

Coordinators will alert volunteers by email/phone of the watch condition and establish who will be available for patrol duty and ask them to stand by.



A fully outfitted vehicle ready for Red Flag patrols.

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Stage II. Red Flag Warning. (24 Hours in advance) Coordinators will notify volunteers of their patrol duty; partner, route, and shift.

Stage III. Red Flag Alert
Coordinators will notify volunteers of the Alert status and have them begin the patrols. When this stage occurs, the coordinator of the business owner Fire Alert Flag Program will call each business and tell them to begin displaying their flag.



It's hard to miss this Red Flag alert!

Stage IV. Cancellation

When coordinators receive notice that the Red Flag condition no longer exists, they will immediately notice both the active patrols and stand by patrols that the alert is no longer in effect. The coordinator of the business owner Fire Alert Flag Program will contact each business and tell them to store their flag until the next alert.

Volunteers use their own vehicles and provide their own personal cell phone, and binoculars. All volunteers must attend a training class after which they are issued a Ready Bag for all supplies (Red with the Fire Alert Logo), a photo ID card, route maps and area maps, a cap with logo, magnetic identification signs for the sides of the car (Red with the Fire Alert Logo), a flag with for window of car (Red with the Fire Alert Logo), and a disposable camera.

In conjunction with the Red Flag Patrols, business owners along major thoroughfares in the area also participate by raising a 3' X 5' Red Fire Alert flags at their businesses to inform the community of Stage III Red Flag Alert conditions.

Following every activation of the Fire Safe Council Red Flag Patrol, an assessment is made with the goal of solving problems and improving all future deployments. In a typical fire season, there are three to five Red Flag Alerts.

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The popularity and success of this program has generated many inquiries from other communities that experience similar wind events and as a result the program is expected to grow in the future. BLM is proud to have supported such an innovative program and looks forward to their continued success in keeping their community members informed and on alert during dangerous conditions.



Community volunteers ready for patrols following training.

Contact: Donna Hummel (916) 978-4436

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Cooperation Leads to Successful Fuel Reduction Project



Tribal members and agency staff work to clear overgrown brush from residential property.

The Bishop BLM Field Office recently assisted the Lone Pine Piute Indian Tribe with a fuel reduction demonstration project. The tribe had received a grant to clear defensible space around a residence on their reservation to show their members how to make their properties more fire safe. Tribal members, along with staff from the

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BLM's chipper was put to good use during the project.



Work crew with the by-products from the demonstration project. The large pile of chipped material was made available for tribal members.

US Forest Service, cleared years of dense, overgrown vegetation. BLM provided a chipper and operator to deal with the cut material. The chipped materials were then made available to the tribal members for landscaping, mulch, and dust control.

The project was a complete success and an excellent example of collaboration and coordination between the Indian community and the two local federal agencies. Tribal members now have an on-site example of a fire safe property and a reminder of how small, individual efforts can contribute to a cumulative benefit for the community.

The completion of this project generated a lot of enthusiasm and a local focus on firewise principles. As a result, tribal members are now in the process of creating a Fire Safe Council in Lone Pine, California with the hopes that the community can expand and perpetuate their efforts to create a fire safe community.

Contact: Matt Kingsley
(760) 872-5055

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South Knob Prescribed Burn

The South Knob Prescribed Burn, located in Lassen County, California near the town of Adin, is a project designed to reduce decadent Big Mountain Sage and dense stands of Western Juniper on over 1500 acres.

This project is a cooperative effort between the Alturas BLM Field Office, the California Department of Forestry and Fire, and a local landowner and BLM permittee.

The purpose of this project is to reduce the fire hazard created by many years of excluding fire from the ecosystem. In addition, this prescribed fire will help to restore

habitat and ecosystem health by reducing encroaching juniper, returning nutrients to the soil, and stimulating growth of grasses and forbs. As a result, forage will be improved for both wildlife and livestock.



Smoke fills the air as the South Knob prescribed fire gets underway.



Firefighters ignite stands of decadent sagebrush.

Burning is being done to promote a mosaic of burned and unburned areas creating habitat diversity. The objective is to burn 75% of the project area. Approximately 400 acres have been burned thus far this fall when prescriptive conditions have been met.

Contact: Jerry Wheeler (530) 233-7910

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Hitting Hazardous Fuels - HARD!

The Bakersfield BLM Field Office is in the process of conducting several strategic hazardous fuel reduction projects in the Kern River Valley. The area, located east of Bakersfield California, is home to many small, dispersed communities and experiences heavy tourism and recreational use centered on the Kern River, Lake Isabella and plentiful public lands. It also has a long history of catastrophic wildfires.



Thinned vegetation is stacked for future pile burns.

During the summer of 2002 alone, over 60 homes were lost during the Deer and Borel fires. In an on-going effort to increase safety and reduce the risk of wildfires, BLM initiated several Wildland Urban Interface projects on BLM public lands near the communities of Tillie, Sawmill, Hungry Gulch, Alta Sierra, Kernville, Lake Isabella and Wofford Heights.

The Tillie 3 and Sawmill/Hungry

Gulch hazardous fuel reduction projects are being done to reduce decadent fuels along roadsides providing access and egress to & from these communities. BLM fire crews from Southfork, Midway, Kennedy Meadows and the Kern Valley Hotshots have spent hundreds of hours this fall cutting, piling, and chipping through the dense chaparral mix to create a critical break in the fuels along these critical evacuation routes.

The cut brush is being either chipped or piled for winter burns. When completed, over 80 acres along over six miles of road will be thinned of overgrown vegetation. These projects will provide several immediate benefits including safer evacuation route for residents, improved access for suppression activities and viable locations from which firefighters can make a safe stand to control a wildfire. The Tillie project also connects several previous BLM and Forest Service efforts in the area, including a fuel break and mosaics of vegetation created by prescribed fires, that are all contributing to reducing the risk of catastrophic fire. Future plans include extending these projects to other local communities at risk.

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In addition, one of the most significant outcomes of these highly visible projects is that community members are more aware and involved in their own pre-fire activities. The Kern Valley Fire Safe Council has become a strong advocate for community involvement and personal responsibility. They have been the recipient of several BLM Community Assistance grants that are helping provide community chipper days, develop homeowner firewise materials, and complete demonstration projects that will serve as local examples of defensible space.

BLM continues to be an involved community partner, committed to reducing the area's risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Contact: Debbie Santiago (661) 391-6097



Continuous chaparral fuels of the Kern River Valley contribute to the history of catastrophic wildfire.



Crews feed the chipper to dispose of thinned vegetation.

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